

THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

A Weekly Journal
CONDUCTED BY
CHARLES DICKENS

No. 789. NEW SERIES.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 12, 1884.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

A DRAWN GAME.

BY BASIL.

AUTHOR OF "LOVE THE DEBT," ETC.

CHAPTER XIV. LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.

THE substance of Mrs. John's troubled thoughts as she and Ida returned together to Edgburn Vicarage was this: "Probably Mrs. Tuck had no children, possibly she would adopt Ida, and might possibly have adopted Archie if she had known him; therefore, what she would consider her cozenage in trapping Mr. Tuck into a renouncement of Archie might one day cost the lad three thousand pounds a year. Still, this was but a possibility, and against it was to be set the certainty that Archie would have been sent back to school, and to Mr. Kett's school, five years ago—nothing short of sentence of death to the child in Mrs. John's eyes. Besides, Archie would have been lost to her for ever. This consideration, though kept carefully in the background of her mind, did not of course weigh the less with her on that account. At least it made the hand which held the scales hold them crooked, so virtually weighting one of them.

Finally, as they reached the vicarage, Mrs. John decided that there was nothing for it now but to let things take their course after she had explained to Ida Archie's relationship to her through Mr. Tuck, and so let the girl's favourable—of course favourable—report of the boy work as it would on Mr. and Mrs. Tuck.

Having shown Ida to her room she sought out the Rev. John in his study, where he was deep in to-morrow's sermon. He listened, dreamily as usual, to the strange story, no more surprised at the coincidence of another of Mr. Tuck's relations coming under Mrs. John's pro-

tection than a sleeper is surprised by the incoherent wonders of his dreams.

"You think of adopting her, dear?" he asked, almost as indifferently as though he were speaking of an invitation to dinner.

"Adopting her! indeed no, John, but I think Mr. Tuck may adopt her. She is going on a visit there."

"Was he at the funeral? I didn't see him."

The Rev. John was trying, but Mrs. John always took his somnambulism pleasantly.

"You didn't notice him in the crowd, I dare say. He wore a shabby black-silk, and a still shabbier bonnet"—her own dress.

The Rev. John merely felt that he was at sea as usual, having probably missed a link in the conversation.

"John dear, didn't you really notice that there wasn't a single soul at the funeral but the poor child herself?"

"I was late and hurried," he explained.

"But there wasn't. I never saw so desolate a funeral, or such a picture of desolation as the poor child herself. It was that which made me ask her in, and get her to tell me all about herself. I wish you would look at her, dear. She has got such a striking face, so old, and sad, and solemn, and beautiful besides. Now do look at her at tea."

"I'll remember," but speaking as a man who was falling asleep again after having been roused.

"No, you won't. I'll put it down on your diary," laughing, as she went to the chimney-piece and scribbled on the Rev. John's diary of engagements, which hung at the side, "Six-thirty p.m., to look at Ida." "There, now you'll remember."

Leaving the Rev. John to relapse into his sermon, Mrs. John hunted up Archie,

and told him of her discovery of this far-off cousin, and of her pathetic history, putting it as pathetically as she could, with a deep design. For, will it be believed that this active-minded little woman was match-making! A marriage between Archie and Ida would reconcile everything and everyone, and her own distracted conscience to boot. Being desirable it seemed probable, and Mrs. John set about to sow the first seeds of love in the hearts of these children in the hope that though the seed might remain latent, or even be overgrown for a time, it might yet one day spring up when opportunity favoured it. Therefore she appealed to Archie's pity and patronage on Ida's behalf. She knew the boy by heart, and felt that dependence was the best passport to his favour. It flattered at once his strength and his weakness, which had been the strength and weakness of his poor father—generosity. Archie, therefore, was duly prepared to pity, protect, and patronise Ida, though, as he said with much loftiness to his mother, "Little girls were not much in his line." Little girls indeed!

Then Mrs. John hurried up to Ida, severely blaming herself for leaving her all this time in the cold bedroom. But no apology was necessary, for the child had not even taken her hat off. She was standing at the window, which commanded a view of the churchyard, lost to everything but her loss.

"My dear child, you haven't even taken your things off. I don't believe you've stirred foot or finger since I left you. And tea coming in!"

"I'm so sorry, Mrs. Pybus; but I sha'n't be a minute now."

"Indeed, dear, I shall not trust you. You're just like Mr. Pybus. He'd go to bed in a chimney-pot hat, if I didn't remonstrate with him against the extravagance of the habit."

This picture of the Rev. John's habitual extravagance made Ida smile. Such a smile! It changed her whole face in a moment, making it altogether lovely. Meanwhile Mrs. John was busy taking her things off, scolding her the while, as if she was a little child, resolute to exorcise this demon of gloom which seemed to have possessed her for years.

"Now you may go and wash your face and hands. No, I shall not leave you, we will go down together. There, that's better. Now for your hair. My dear child, what a quantity of hair! You

should have a wool-combing machine for it. Did you never wear it down your back?"

"Not since I was a child, Mrs. Pybus," Ida replied, without the least consciousness of absurdity.

"Oh, not since you were a child. I didn't know you'd ever been a child. But, Ida, I mean to make a child of you while you're with me. Mind that, my dear. I think I shall put you in pinafores and short frocks, with bare arms and legs, and let you go shares in my pocket-handkerchief."

Ida again smiled as she stood opposite the glass, while Mrs. John was deftly doing her hair.

"There, you're like Alice in Wonderland, you're getting smaller already. How long is it since you saw that bright face in the glass? Not since you were a child? There's the tea-bell. Come."

But Ida's heart failed her at the thought of facing strangers.

"I think, Mrs. Pybus, if you wouldn't mind, I—I'd rather not go down this evening."

"Nonsense, my dear. There's only Mr. Pybus, who never sees any one, unless you screw him up to it like an opera-glass, and Archie, your cousin, who is only a child. Besides, it's only for a few minutes, we shall send them both away when they've had their tea."

It will be seen that Mrs. John, for all her good resolutions, could not help speaking to Ida as though she were out of her teens, instead of just into them.

Ida was relieved to find no one in the breakfast-room when they entered. The Rev. John was always late, and generally needed to be summoned two or three times to each meal; while Archie had shot off in a frenzy of excitement upon a report from Tom Chown that the weasel, which had desolated his rabbit-hutch, was trapped at last. The maid was sent to knock up the Rev. John, who came in thereon with unusual promptitude, and with an air of resolution, and marched up to Ida as to the imminent deadly breach.

"How do you do, Miss Tuck? I'm glad to see you. I hope your father is quite well."

And then, after a look that cried "plaudite" to Mrs. John, he sat down, relieved, to his tea. Ida, tongue-tied as usual, said nothing, but that, of course, he didn't notice. Nor would he have noticed it if her answer had been the correct

equivalent of his question, "He is quite dead, thank you."

Before Ida had quite recovered from her confusion, Archie burst into the room like a shell, forgetting "the little girl's" existence in his excitement.

"Mother, we've got him! Such a——"

Here, encountering Ida's solemn, star-like eyes, he recollected himself and her, and collapsed.

"I hope he'll keep, Archie, for the tea won't. There, shut the door, gently if you can, and sit down. This is your cousin Archie, Ida."

Ida rose up timidly, as at a formal introduction, and held out her hand shyly, which Archie, with greater shyness, shook in silence. For the rest of the meal Mrs. John had to do all the talking, as the other three were as cheerful and sociable as hens under an arch on a wet day.

Ida's first impression of Archie was simply that he was a very boyish boy. But Archie's first impression of Ida was more positively unflattering. She was not a "little girl" by any means, nor patronisable, nor sociable, nor even approachable, and she wouldn't care for rabbits. In this last discreditable defect of hers there was some consolation, for he needn't now offer her his black and white lop-eared doe, which he had been moved mentally to vow to her on hearing from his mother of her troubles. Still, the boy was not easy in his mind about the matter. He would have been glad to please his mother and himself by doing Ida kindnesses if she would have allowed him, but she seemed beyond their reach altogether. However, next morning he thought he saw his chance.

It was Sunday morning, and on Sunday mornings, from time immemorial, all the church-bells in that district were rung at eight o'clock. Now Archie, of late, had taken enthusiastically to bell-ringing, and was allowed to practise his 'prentice-hand only at this eight o'clock réveillée. Therefore he was early at the churchyard gates, to find Ida there before him. She had expected that they would have been open.

"I'll get the keys," he said in a shy subdued voice, and shot off to the sexton's. Returning immediately, he opened the gate, and was rewarded with a tremulous "Thank you," and a look which made him long to do something worth thanks for her.

While she made for her mother's grave, Archie opened the church, and climbed up to the tower, and looked out from one of its loophole windows on Ida standing stupefied by the new-made grave. It was in a horrible condition—a foul heap of shiny yellow clay, sunk down on one side, and it looked more horrible by contrast with the neatly-kept graves around. In fact, the natural soil of the graveyard was brick-clay, in which nothing would grow, but in five years Mrs. John had made the wilderness blossom as the rose. She was even more anxious to have the churchyard beautified than the church, and she so worked upon the feelings of the people that there was a competition amongst most of them as to the gardening of these graves. Each brought barrows of soil for the grave of his own dead, and sowed, and planted, and kept it weeded throughout the year. So it was that poor Mrs. Luard, who had never seen so lovely a churchyard, begged Ida to have her buried here. But poor Mrs. Luard's own grave, as we say, was in a horrible state, and was specially revolting to Ida with her notion that her mother had lost neither her knowledge of nor her pleasure in what had been dear to her here.

The child was so distressed at the state of the grave that Archie saw her hurry to meet the sexton, as he came in to give the boy his lesson in bell-ringing, and say something to him, pointing to the grave.

"What did she say to you, Blogg?"

"Yon lass? Shoo axed me what Aw'd fettle* yon grave for. But shoo mun sam it up† for hersen. Aw'm nooan bahn to hev' nobbody's lavins."

That is to say, he must have all the graves or none in his charge. The Rev. John's permission to the parishioners to have access at all times to the churchyard, and to attend to their own graves, instead of paying Blogg to neglect them, was an exceedingly sore point with the surly sexton. So he poured vitriol into Ida's bleeding heart. Archie, too indignant with Blogg to take his lesson, and anxious to relieve Ida's mind on this point, hurried down the steep tower stairs and out into the churchyard. But Ida had gone back to the vicarage, and when Archie found her there in the breakfast-room, gazing into the fire with a look of wretchedness in her

* "Fettle"—i.e. put in order. † "Sam it up"—i.e. heap it up.

wan face, he lost courage and stole out of the room again.

But next morning, at the dawn, that is, at six-thirty—he had to go to Leeds to school at nine o'clock—he and Tom Chown were working at the grave like navvies, first levelling the unsightly yellow sludge, then covering it deep with barrow upon barrowful of soil from the vicarage garden, and then banking it up with sods from the common.

"I tell you what, Tom," said Archie, as he straightened himself to rest, with a rake in his hand, and with his head critically on one side to admire his work; "I tell you what, Tom, I shall make it the nicest grave in the churchyard. I shall plant my white moss-rose there," making a hole with the rake at the head of the grave, "and I shall have a cross of violets, like that on Mrs. Parry's grave, only prettier, down the centre, and I shall—put—at the sides——" hesitatingly. "I must get mother to find out what flowers she likes best. If——"

Here he felt a timid and tremulous hand on his arm, and looking round found behind him Ida, with "a face like a benediction," all her full heart shining through her eyes. She had seen them at work from her window, and had hurried out in time to overhear Archie's plan for making the grave the prettiest in the churchyard. Tom Chown shuffled off shamefaced with an empty barrow, not quite sure that it wasn't a scrape, as almost every enterprise Archie inveigled him into was. Archie also was shy and shamefaced. In truth, he was thinking less of Ida's gratification than of his own credit, when he boasted that he would make the grave the prettiest in the graveyard, for everything he took in hand was to be a masterpiece, and might have been, perhaps, if he hadn't tired of it as heartily as he undertook it before it had risen above ground. Therefore, Ida's thanks, expressed on her face, seemed out of all proportion to his service, and as he couldn't bear being overpaid, he was ill at ease, and shamefaced, and cast about for means to balance the account. Ida, with, for her, extraordinary demonstrativeness, let her hand slip down his arm to take his, which she held and pressed, saying only, "I saw you from the window. I wanted to thank you," when she stopped, over-come.

"That brute, Blogg, the sexton, you know, that you asked to do it, he's an old beast! It wasn't a bit of trouble. I

say, I wish you liked rabbits. Do come and look at them. There's a black and white one, such a beauty; I wish you'd have it—will you? Do!"

Ida misunderstood this sudden change of subject to be meant as a diversion of her grief and of her gratitude, and was surprised and more moved than ever by the thoughtful kindness of Archie, whom, of course, she regarded as years younger than herself. And, as her heart in her sorrow was even like melting wax, the boy's considerate generosity made a lifelong impression upon it.

"I should like to see them very much," she said. So they returned together to the house, Archie dilating upon the ravages, the size, and the fate of the weasel, and Ida distressed with the thought, "Beggars that I am, I am even poor in thanks." She could say only, "No, thank you, I wouldn't know what to do with it," when Archie offered in succession a rabbit, a pair of pigeons, a pen-knife, and a catapult. At last, seeing that with Archie the most acceptable way to acknowledge an obligation was to increase it, she said, "If you would plant those flowers, I would rather have it than anything else, Archie," using his name for the first time shyly, but in a tone that expressed how near she had been drawn to him in the last few minutes. There was something in the request, and in the sad, sweet tone in which it was made, that went to Archie's heart, and stirred him to say with a face aglow with generous impulse:

"I shall make it my garden."

Perhaps if Ida had cast her eyes on his garden, lying a few feet from her, mapped out distinctly with weeds, she might not have so treasured up his promise. But she knew that this square plot was his garden only when she saw it wrenched up, and ravaged, and in wild confusion an hour later.

"Has the pig been in again, Tom?" asked Mrs. John, as she and Ida looked down on the desolation which only the unskilled labour of a pig apparently could have wrought.

"It was Master Archie, mum. He's put 'em all on yon grave," nodding towards Ida.

Ida had already made Mrs. John happy with an account of Archie's goodness, and of the promise of which this transplantation was the earnest.

"I'm so sorry," began Ida.

"I'm not," said Mrs. John; "I've been

coveting his garden this long time. Besides, he'd never give you or me a moment's peace until he had done something for you. When he likes anyone very much, he's never happy till he gives them something."

This, "likes anyone very much," was rather strong for two days' acquaintance-ship; and for Archie's real feeling towards Ida; but the wish was father to the thought with Mrs. John, and father to the fact as it turned out. For, in truth, she did contrive to bring about at least one-half of her fine scheme. Before Ida's visit to the vicarage was over, Archie was in love with her—impetuously, of course.

Boys fall in love with their seniors, and, in all but years, Ida was years his senior. She had always for him the most winning looks in the world, she was his contrast in character, and she allowed him to do her kindnesses. So Archie fell headlong in love with ludicrous seriousness.

It is astonishing how passionately before the dawn of passion some children love; how the refraction and divine presentiment of the passion "rises ere it rise" upon them.

Archie shirked school—with Mrs. John's designing connivance—to haunt Ida like her shadow; he was always on the lookout to do her service, and he spent all his pocket-money in presents for her.

But the other half of Mrs. John's design was, of course, not so manageable. Ida's heart was too much taken up with grief, for love to find room in it. Nevertheless, afterwards, Archie's devotion made its way into it, just as words, which some preoccupation prevents us hearing when they are spoken, wait for admission in the anteroom of the mind, and enter on the departure of more pressing guests.

On the night before Ida's departure for Kingsford, Archie made her his final present—a writing-desk—for which Mrs. John supplied the funds, Archie's purse having been long depleted.

"I want you to write to me, Ida," said the boy plaintively, with his eager face looking pleadingly into hers.

Ida, lost in a wonder, which looked out through her eyes, at Archie's goodness towards her, made no answer to this request, but said only and helplessly:

"I've nothing to give."

"Yes, you have. I wish——" And then he paused ashamed.

"What, Archie? What is it?" eagerly.

"I wish you'd give me a bit of your hair," faltered the lovelorn youth, blushing furiously.

"My hair! But, Archie, I'm not going away altogether," completely taken aback.

"No matter, I wish you'd give me a bit."

"Of course I'll give you a bit. There, take as much as you like," letting down a deluge of dark silken hair.

"You give it, Ida," said Archie.

Ida fetched a pair of scissors, cut a long tress, and handed it to him, saying:

"I wish, Archie——" But before she could complete the sentence, Archie, as if moved by an uncontrollable impulse, flung both his arms round her neck and kissed her passionately, trembling all over with excitement.

"Ida, I love you." Ida's breath was taken away by the sudden and impetuous fervour of the embrace. "And I shall always love you better than anyone else in the world," continued Archie—"always."

"And I shall always love you, Archie," said Ida, when she came to herself, kissing him in turn affectionately, as an elder sister would kiss her little pet brother.

"Ida," continued Archie with ever-growing excitement, his arm round her neck and his head bent forward to look eagerly into her eyes—"Ida, I want you to say you will marry me when I grow up to be a man."

"Marry you!" faltered Ida; "I never thought—I don't think I shall ever marry, Archie," quite bewildered.

"Oh, Ida, and I love you so!" in a voice of despair.

"But you're only a child, Archie, you know, and——"

"I'm not a child," broke in Archie, cut to the quick by this terrible insult. "I shall be fourteen in September, and you're only thirteen, and I thought—I thought——" But here the boy broke down with a sob, and turned away to hide his unmanly tears.

Ida was pained and pricked to the heart, and put her arm round his neck, and said soothingly:

"I shall always love you, Archie—always, and I shall marry you, if you want me, when you're a man."

Whereupon Archie flung his arms round her neck again, and kissed and clung to

her, wetting her cheek with his childish tears.

At this point Mrs. John enters, and the "guilty things surprised" start asunder, Archie bolting ingloriously from the room, and Ida's face, through her disordered hair, blushing like the moon through clouds.

Mrs. John was delighted, but discreetly silent, and of course our reserved little maid was silent also.

"Ida, my dear, if you are going to wear your hair down your back we must bank it up some way, if we're to see anything of you," said the considerate little woman, considerably getting behind Ida to busy herself with the child's hair. When she had plaited and tied it with a red ribbon, which glowed against the glossy black, she said, "There! Let us see how you look in that style," coming to the front again to admire her with head on one side. "You'll always look what you are, child, the oldest and dearest little woman in the world," taking Ida's still glowing face between her hands, and kissing it with the kiss of a mother-in-law in posse, which differs from the kiss of a mother-in-law in esse, as wine from vinegar.

Next day Ida departed. Mrs. John only went with her to Leeds. Her betrothed had to go to school, but would yet have got out in time to have seen her off by train, if he hadn't been kept in by a most unmanly imposition. Mrs. John and Ida left themselves an hour's margin in Leeds, as Mrs. John had shopping to do, and Ida mysterious business—no other than the redemption of the gold chain, without which she dared not face Mrs. Tuck. She could not bring herself to explain this business to Mrs. John, whom she left to wait for her in a confectioner's, while she sped at a swift pace and a heart that beat time with it to the abhorred pawnbroker's. This gentleman, however, was much more scrupulous about returning than about receiving the chain. His conscience, now thoroughly awake, would not permit his giving it up without previous consultation with the police. This much-desired relief, we are glad to say, it had. For Ida, now at bay, hurried back to tell the whole story with much shame of face to Mrs. John, so disclosing depths in her past life, and depths in her heart, which endeared her doubly to that good little woman.

Mrs. John rushed impetuously up to the first policeman she saw, told him so much

of the story as was necessary to secure his help, and so did, not Ida only, but her country, service. For the policeman did not rest content with relieving the pawnbroker's conscience of the weight of the chain, but did what he could to restore it to a thoroughly healthy state by disburdening it of some really stolen goods, and sending it into a retreat for six months, to recover its tone in the wholesome solitude of Wakefield Jail.

This business done, Mrs. John and Ida hurried to the station, and Ida took her ticket, third-class, Mrs. John's expostulations notwithstanding. She would neither allow Mrs. John to pay for first or second class tickets, nor would she spend a farthing more of Mr. Tuck's money on herself than she could help. Her life of grinding poverty had taught her to be particular about a sixpence—that of course—but more than that, to be especially particular about a sixpence which was not her own. So Mrs. John had to submit.

As they walked up and down the platform waiting for the train, Ida was silent, but looked up into Mrs. John's face two or three times as if about to speak.

At last, as the train that was to take her backed in by the platform, and there were but three minutes left her, she hurried Mrs. John into the empty waiting-room, and looking up into her face with her solemn eyes, more solemn than ever, said only, "Mother did send you." But face and voice filled in the ellipsis of love and gratitude, and so thrilled Mrs. John that she took the child in her arms and kissed her again and again, till they had to rush to catch the moving train.

When Ida reached Kingsford it was night and wet, and she stood wretched by her slender luggage on the platform, waiting till the porters had attended to all the first and second class passengers. Then she ventured to ask one to take her luggage to a cab.

"Cab? There ain't none."

"How far is it to The Keep—to Mr. Tuck's?"

"It's a matter of three mile, or better."

Then, after a pause:

"Will you please take my luggage to the parcel office?" which was done accordingly, and Ida set out to walk through mud and rain the three miles and a half to The Keep.

Mrs. Tuck had sent the carriage to meet her, but the coachman having looked in vain in all the first-class carriages for a

young lady about eighteen, named Miss Luard, had driven away with a free conscience.

Nearly an hour after his return with this news Ida stood in the hall of The Keep wet, bedraggled, and bespattered with mud, while the footman went to announce the appearance of this questionable character. Mrs. Tuck herself came out.

"What do you want?"

"I'm Ida Luard," in a faltering voice and with a sinking heart.

"Ida Luard! Why, how old are you?"

"Thirteen."

Mrs. Tuck stood as though stupefied, but roused herself at last to ask:

"How did you come, child?"

"I walked."

All Mrs. Tuck's good-nature was on fire in a moment. She kissed Ida effusively and led her in and petted her, and even got Mr. Tuck to welcome her in his way—a fish-like way. But even Mr. Tuck looked kindly upon her when he heard that she had travelled third-class, and when he saw her precise account of every farthing he had sent her.

FLYAWAY JACK.

A MANX YARN.

THE Manx have an aptitude for inventing nicknames, which are indeed very necessary in the island, the same surnames being so prevalent that without some distinction there would be "confusion worse confounded." There are so many Kellys, for example, that they have to be differentiated into Kelly the Lug, Kelly Bigbones, Kelly Ballavinch (a village), Kelly Dhone (the Fair-haired), Kelly Moar (the Great), even Kelly Moar Kelly Beg (Kelly the Great, son of Kelly the Little), and so on. But how Flyaway Jack came by his singular name, nobody seemed to know. By trade, he was a cobbler; and as his curious hoppy walk often caused the loose ends of the apron that was tucked round his waist to flap up and down, this may, perhaps, have suggested the idea of wings, though I should have thought the position rather lower than usual. Perhaps he was so called on account of his temper, which was volcanic; or perhaps his sobriquet had its origin in one of his own strange stories.

Though loose of limb, he was powerfully built, rather tall, with but little flesh on his bones, and muscles like pin-wire. His hair, whiskers, and stubby beard were of

a sandy-red colour—a sure sign that lava is somewhere about—his features were hard and sharp; his eyes, small, grey, and keen; and, to complete the picture, he usually wore both indoors and out an old peaked cap on the very back of his head. As for his age, it was the favourite bone of contention in the neighbourhood. When the conversation flagged, you had merely to ask, How old is Flyaway Jack? and every tongue was wagging in brisk dispute. External evidence put him at upwards of sixty; appearances, at a short forty.

In his youth he had been a smuggler—a very desperate one according to his own account. It was only when smuggling became an unprofitable and uncomfortable profession that these palmy days came to an end, and he took to cobbling; which he supplemented by laying prompt hands upon such unclaimed wreckage as floated ashore under his cottage, and generally by keeping an eye open for opportunities. Flyaway Jack, then, was a man of experience and resource, a cobbler and character at once; and as such he was interesting and amusing, a capital companion for a wet day. Many a pleasant hour have I spent with him; listening to the sea-stories that his imagination could readily supply, when his memory failed him.

He lived in a little thatched cottage, which faced the beach, and stood back in a recess, formed by a sudden broadening of the road that skirts Castletown Bay. While it looked almost as venerable as Castle Rushen, a slight bulging was the only sign of decrepitude; for the walls were of great thickness and built of unhewn stones of every shape and size, embedded, not in latter-day mud, but in mortar which had hardened with age, and was indeed quite petrified. The ladder-like staircase descended to the very door, which was always open; and of the two downstairs rooms, that on the right hand was Flyaway Jack's workshop. The floor was of hard clay, worn into hills and hollows; the chimney occupied a large protruding buttress; and though the fireplace was magnificent in its dimensions, the grate was small and simple—a couple of loose bricks and an iron bar—and the tiny window, deep-set in the thick wall, which was decorated with pictures from the illustrated papers, was used as a cupboard, rather to the detriment of the light.

After passing through the doorway, which the shrunken door made no pretence

of filling, you found yourself in the midst of leather, and even suspected that it was burning in the grate. Great tanned skins hung from the rafters, and were piled upon the table in the corner; the floor was in some places mountainous with chips; rows of old boots stood against the walls. Immediately opposite the telescopic window was Flyaway Jack, seated upon a compound arrangement of bench and tool-tray. His greeting was always cordial, one hand extended to shake, and the other pointing to the chair by the fire; not a word until you were seated. All further ceremony was dispensed with, he addressed everybody by his christian-name. One of my visits may be taken as a sample of many.

Shortly after I had occupied the vacant chair, there came creeping in old Johnnie Caggherty, the crab-catcher, a centenarian fossil, silent but reflective, with a little, bent, wizened body, a brown, deeply-furrowed face, and clothes to match.

"Well, Johnnie, how goes it?" asked Flyaway Jack cheerily.

"Aw middlin', boy, just middlin'. The crabs is scarce, very," was Johnnie's invariable response, accompanied by a doleful shaking of the head. The crabs were laid upon the floor for our inspection, and a finer collection it would have been hard to find. Still, those who plough the sea have as much right to grumble as those who dig the land.

When Johnnie had taken a seat upon a box by the fireside, there entered two stalwart, yellow-bearded fishermen, in knee-boots and blue guernseys; then one of the hobblers from the quay, and lastly, a lunatic. Perhaps this needs some explanation.

I am writing of a good many years ago, when there was no actual asylum in the island, only a building large enough to hold dangerous patients. The others either lived with their friends, or were boarded out and wandered at will about the country. One fellow, I remember, was rather given to hurling boulders at those whom he thought objectionable; but he was considered harmless, though I used to pass him somewhat gingerly. The majority of these unfortunates came from England; and as there is a Manx law forbidding the importation of paupers, and compelling ship-captains at their own expense to take them back again, I never could see why English lunatics should be more acceptable. However, the one had money and the other had

not, so the advantage of a few led to the inconvenience of many.

The individual who joined our party was a Miss Todd, a lady by birth, whose mania was to deck herself out in all manner of finery. If this alone be lunacy, I fear that one sex would be wholly engaged in locking up and watching the other; but Miss Todd, by carrying all her wardrobe on her back, committed the gross blunder of overstepping the line prescribed by custom. Without being too prying, I may say that she wore five dresses so arranged as to show that she had got them on, a shawl or two, a few neckties, or whatever you call them, and a couple of bonnets tastefully placed one above the other. This, her relatives decided, was going rather too far, so, like "Dame Eleanor Cobham, Gloucester's wife," she was banished to the Isle of Man. Her face was a perpetual simper. In brief, had she been a little less eccentric, she must have taken high rank in the fashionable world.

Her appearance in Flyaway Jack's cottage was due to a heavy shower, which threatened to spoil her finery. I offered her my seat, but she mendaciously replied that she preferred standing; and when I persisted, our host, waving me a dictatorial "No," called to his wife to bring "a chair for a lady." Until it arrived, Miss Todd amused herself with Johnnie Caggherty's crabs, which, though tied together, were crawling about before the fire—a dangerous pastime, watched by the fishermen with much interest, not to say expectancy. The scene would have been an excellent one for a painter.

At last we were all seated, the yellow-bearded ones upon the table, and when a hunk of stranded timber had been flung upon the fire, the hobbler, with a wink at me, said to our host:

"Let's have that yarn o' yours 'bout the cutter chasin' ye in the bay here. It'll help pass the time away till the rain gives over."

"Oh yes, please tell it, Mr. Flyaway Jack," seconded the lunatic, her hands clasped entreatingly.

There was a laugh at this singular style of address.

Although Flyaway Jack, who had a great dislike for his sobriquet, looked alarmingly explosive, he contented himself with a scornful:

"What better can you expect from a poor soft thing?"

This was very hard on poor Miss Todd,

who was quite ignorant of her sin, the words touching her on her sorest point, vanity, and she hung her head and remained unusually silent.

As there was an awkward pause, I said:

"I should greatly like to hear your story, Jack."

"Sure I don't min' tellin' it at all; but it's another thread that I'll get goin' first, so as not to be stoppin'."

Selecting a thread from the tray by his side, he waxed it, rubbed it until it became like wire, and then began to stitch vigorously at the boot he held between his knees. A very solid craftsman was Flyaway Jack, his work being well adapted for use among the sharp crags of Langness, the long, low, rocky promontory which creeps round the bay. At length he was ready, and though he sometimes turned to mark the effect of his words upon us, who were grouped around the fire, the exigencies of his work compelled him to sit facing the window during the greater part of the time he was speaking.

"In my younger days," he began, "there's no denyin' that the most gentleman'y business any wan could take to was smugglin'; an' it was such nice, clane, aisy, profitable work that on'y a few noodle-pated bodies kep' out o' it; an' it was sour-eyed enough they were when they saw the piles o' money we were makin' without so much as a haporth o' trouble. Tut! wherever you go it's mortal sure you are to come across a dog-in-the-manger, an' a mischievous baste he is, too. But let him pass. You see, the islan' 's well placed for just slippin' across, on the quiet like, to the neighbourin' countries; an' it's crowded the coast is with gran' caves an' holes an' glens for storin' o' the goods; an', as if that wasn't enough, every house worth spakin' about had great cellars runnin' far away un'er the groun'. Sure, now, it would ha' been a scandalous thing to ha' thrown away such beautiful opportunities; an' if Nature hadn't built Manxmen for smugglers, I'd just like to know what they are fit for? Any way, as everybody smuggled, I wasn't goin' for to run counter to them at all. 'Deed, what was I, to lift up my voice? A mere chit, with my way to make in the world honestly. So I just smuggled along with the rest."

I imagine that Flyaway Jack's introduction was addressed solely to myself. Old Johnnie Caggherty cannot be said to

have possessed a very tender conscience on the score of smuggling; and the same remark probably applies to the others, except perhaps Miss Todd. I don't know whether or not a lunatic is entitled to a conscience.

"As time went by, I rose in my profession, and people began to touch their hats to me, for I was handy enough when I turned my min' to a thing; an' what with good luck and mebbe seamanship, after a few years I came to be the master o' the Saucy Maid, the smartest little schooner as ever walked the Channel. The fun we used to have, to be sure, runnin' in un'er the Big Cellar yon'er, an' creepin' like dumb mice through the town at dead o' night, the wheels o' the cart muffled in crape—aye, an' the horses' feet, too, so as not to make a soun' at all."

"But, Jack," I ventured to say, "had you learnt navigation?"

"Not I," he answered with unmistakable contempt. "What more can a man want than a compass an' the stars? As long as I could see the Rhaid Mooar Ree Ghorree, I was quite content. An' what's that? you ask. The Big Road o' King Orry, or the Milky Way, as some call it."

"But what did you do on a dark night?" I asked.

"Aw, I just picked my way through it somehow."

"Puddles," suggested Miss Todd, simpering at the crabs at her feet.

"Quite so," said Flyaway Jack severely.

"You must have spoilt the crape," she added rather vaguely.

"Hoot! woman, be still; can't you? And now, sirs, to come to my story, which is that strange you'll har'ly believe it, though it's gospel truth, as sure as I'm sittin' here, an' nothin' can be more sartin than that. It was a dark night in November, the moon not up, an' great black clouds hangin' about the mountain-tops, a sure sign it'll be puffy when the win's off the lan'. An' it was off the lan' for us on board o' the Saucy Maid. It was smooth water though, an' we were steppin' up Channel nicely, lavin' a long white wake behin' like a road o' snow; but there was a dirty look about the sky I didn't half like, so when we reached the back o' Langlish, it was right glad we were to see a fire blazin' among the rocks. We knew then that we could walk straight into the bay without any

fear o' being bothered with the Government cutter, which had the bad manners to be always pokin' its nose where it wasn't wanted; an' when by any chance we had happened to meet, it was like two tom-cats on the top o' a narrow wall, snappin' an' howlin' an' scratchin', and then one makin' a bolt o' it. But this time, as we were tould next day, some o' the lads on shoore had taken pity upon the poor thing, lying there in idleness; an' as they knew the Saucy Maid must be about due, they just sent the cutter down to the Calf on a fool's errand, so that there might be no chance o' our interferin' with one another; for it's far better to live with your neighbour peacefully than to be punchin' his face continually.

"The tide was tearin' along to the west'ard like a mill-race, so it wasn't long before we were roun' the Sk'r'ranes and inside o' the bay. Up to this time luck had favoured us nicely, an' if you'd on'y seen the way we handled the schooner I'm thinkin' you'd ha' said we deserved all we got—aye, an' more too, for it was a mighty bad thing that was comin' upon us. After we'd taken a short stretch towards Scarlet—for the win' was blowin' right out o' the bay—an' after we'd put her about an' fetched underneath this very house, what should the moon do but start up above Langlish, an' at the same moment that pitiful sneak o' a cutter shove her nose roun' the Stack o' Scarlet. Well, here was a nice business, if you like, sirs. It was fairly caught in a mousetrap we were. The mate un'er me was a man o' the name o' Quinney—Dick Quinney. Mebbe you'll remember him, Johnnie? Well, I signalled him alongside to where I was stannin' in the starn, an' says I, 'Quinney, here's a fine kettle o' fish, the like o' which I've naver seen in all my born days, and naver wish to see again.' An' says I, 'But how to get out o' it, that's what I want to know, for, come what may, I won't run the schooner ashore, an' leave her to yon'er harpies to pick an' steal, an' do what they like with. We'll make a run for it somehow.' He agreed with me on that, though he was a shallow-brained fallow, after all, so I just called up the crew an' tould 'em that we were goin' for to do some manœuvrin', an' after that showa' clane pair o' heels to the cutter, though I tell you honestly that I didn't see my way to it, and only thought it right to keep up their spirits. 'Grog,' says I, 'grog all roun', an' the master will help ye, an' then to work.' So

grog it was, pretty stiff, an' as they wiped their mouths with the backs o' their hands, every sowl on board looked as fierce as a tiger, ready to spring at the cutter if I was to give the word. But that wasn't my game at all, as long as it could be avoided. I always liked to have caution in front an' bravery comin' behin' it.

"So, instead of comin' to an anchor, as many would ha' done, I had just hove the schooner to, with the jib hauled to wind'ard, an' all the canvas, even to the topsail, set an' ready for a start in case of an unlucky accident like this was. You see, the cutter daren't fire at us, for we were lyin' between her an' the town, an' without tackin' she couldn't run down upon us, owin' to the way the win' was; but, just to make more sure, we crep' up a little nearer the harbour and waited. An' now, whether it was she thought we would give in at wance without any more trouble, or whether it was the white fatter was flyin' on board, for there had been some toughish fights o' late—anyway, she made as stupid a blunder as ever was. Her proper coorse was to ha' lain about midway between the Sk'r'ranes an' the Stack, an' to ha' sent her boats in to us, an' then there'd ha' been nothin' for it but fightin', an' there's no knowin' who'd ha' got the best o' it, for our lads were handy enough at that game. But, instead of that, what does the stupid thing do but make a long tack across the bay an' un'er Langlish, intendin' to slant over to Scarlet, and then run us down nicely. That is, sirs, if we were foolish enough to wait for her. I saw the move, though, an' shouted to Quinney to run up the balloon-jib for a spinnaker, an' almost quicker than I'm telling ye, the Saucy Maid was racin' before the win' like a mad thing. An' now another piece o' luck befell us, for the blunderin' cutter had been runnin' so high in the win', tryin' to creep up nearer to us, that when she tried to go about, she missed stays, an' before she'd got enough way on again, we were more than half across the bay. Sure, it was a right good start we'd got, an' now came as putty a chase as aver you saw, I'll warrant, both vessels rippin' through the water like a chisel through a lump o' black wood, an' lavin' a long track o' white shavin's behind.

"Says Quinney to me, rangin' alongside, 'It's away we are. Them dolts 'll naver catch the Saucy Maid now.'

"'Don't be too sure,' says I, for the man had a consated way I didn't approve

of, and it wasn't for him to come to me with his opinions at all—unasked, at any rate.

"'Oh, but——' says he.

"'Oh, but——' says I, interruptin' him. 'And what's the use o' your "oh, buts"?' 'Foddee yn moddey s' jerree tayrtyn y mwaagh.'" He understood that, an' went away sulky because I wouldn't listen to his nonsense."

"What does it mean, Jack?" I asked.

"It's an ould Manx proverb, 'Mebbe the last dog's catchin' the hare;' that's the meanin' o' it, an' it comes true pretty reglar. Anyway, it looked as if it was goin' for to be true in our case; for it was soon aisy to see that, what with the strong gusts tumblin' out o' the mountains yet har'ly rufflin' the sea, an' the cutter's bigger spread o' canvas, she was overhaulin' us quickly. Though I hated her so I would ha' seen her go to the bottom gladly, yet she was a gran' sight, glidin' along on an even keel like some great gull or gannet, an' her white sails stretched an' swellin', an' the moonlight streamin' upon her, an' the dark water aroun', an' the great hills behin' the sleepin' town. An' here were we, har'ly a mile ahead o' her; the crew all clustered together an' scarcely spakin', but just watchin' the white sails comin' nearer and nearer. The win' was blowin' harder up aloft than down on deck, and that was dippin' the schooner's nose into it an' stoppin' her way; though, for all that, she was tremblin' from stem to stern, havin' about as much canvas as she could carry safely. If it hadn't been runnin' we were, we must have taken some o' it off her; an' even as it was, when one squall after another struck her, I thought, for sure, to see some o' her top spars go—but they held on bravely, bendin' like whips.

"The cutter must ha' made pretty sure o' catchin' us. She never fired a shot, though every moment I expected to see her head yaw and hear a ball come whistlin' past our ears; but not at all, she just held on in our wake. Somethin' had to be done, and that quickly, or it was all up with us. The clouds clung to the mountains an' the moon to the blue sky, an' the win' was gettin' more steady as we left the lan' astarn; so there was no hope from that quarter.

"'Look here, lads,' I said, 'we're in a desperate case, an' there's on'y wan way out o' it that I can see. Wan o' us must go overboard.'

"They stared very hard at that, an'

some o' them began to pull long faces, till I felt well-nigh dancin' mad with them; an' when Quinney came forward as spokesman, I just tould him to hould his tongue, or I'd heave him overboard and get out o' two difficulties that way. There's nothin' like discipline; an' if you spake without showin' that you meant it, you'd far batter have been silent. So I showldered a belayin'-pin, an' after that, peace was restored, everywan being ready enough to obey.

"Says I, 'Now that I've made my intentions plain, I tell ye again that wan o' us must go overboard; but I wish on'y fair play, an' I'm goin' for to take my chance with the rest o' ye. Quinney, cut some twine into lengths, an' whoever draws the longest piece goes overboard with a bucket to hold on to.'

"Well, sirs, he did as I ordered him, an' when we had all drawn, I foun' that the longest piece had fallen to me. This was unlucky, too, for the schooner could ill afford to part with her master; but as I was preparin' to go, some o' them came forward an' said that that white-livered cur, Quinney, had chopped the end off his piece with a knife. So what did I do but up with the belayin'-pin an' knocked him flat on the deck; an' that was the way I argued with him. It was foolish o' me, however, for now that he was unable to go overboard I had to go, my piece being the next longest. But before I did so, I had the spinnaker taken in, and altered the schooner's head for the Calf. If she could on'y get there before she was caught, she might slip through the Soun', an' as it was nearly low water at the time, the big cutter wouldn't dare follow her. This was my plan for her safety; though, you see, it had to be compassed at some peril to myself. But I had no time to be thinkin' o' that; an' heavin' a bucket over the side I jumped after it.

"When I came up, puffin' and splashin', I began to think that I'd made a foolish mistake; for when the water's like ice, the courage is apt to get frozen too; an' it doesn't improve matters to see one vessel showin' you her heels, and another a good half-a-mile astarn. To tell the truth, I wished I was safely on board the schooner again; for, though I could swim like a fish, there was just a chance o' the cutter not seein' me, an' then a nice mess I should be in. All this an' a good deal more passed through my min' as I was strikin' out for the bucket; an' when I reached it

I raised one arm in the air, an' began to shout an' splash, doin' everything in my power to attract attention. You see, when the Saucy Maid shifted her course to the west'ard, the cutter followed suit; so I was some four or five hundred yards outside of where she would pass. An' beside that, the win' was blowin' right away from her an' comin' with mortal force over the water now that we were a good distance out. But to make a long tale short, she saw me at last, an' gave up the chase to pick me up, as I had expected, at least until I got into the water; an' when she was thirty yards away she hove to an' lowered a boat.

"An' now, sir, for the strange part o' my story. I'd hooked my arm into the handle o' the bucket, which had been half-sunk before; but now I chanced to lay it on its side facin' the quarter the win' was comin' from, an' a squall dashed down an' filled it like a mainsail, carryin' me along over the surface o' the water like a mackerel. It's true as I'm here. The boat couldn't catch me at all, though the oars were slashin' and tearin' like mad. It was the most ridic'ulous thing you ever saw. I lay on my back and laughed, it was so queer to see the surprised faces in the boat turnin' to look at me; though, I tell ye, the arms were near being dragged off my body. Well, here was a way out o' all my troubles, an' a way I'd never ha' thought of in a month o' Sundays. The boat stuck to it gamely, an' sometimes when there was a lull I thought she was goin' to catch me after all; but after a moment or two there would come another squall, an' rip! away I was shootin' like a rocket. Seein' this strange thing, the cutter swung her head roun' and gave chase too; an' I thought it was all up with me till a bright idea came into my head. I had been runnin' before the win', never thinkin' I could go any other way; but now I just twisted my legs roun' and used them as a rudder, an' away I went for the lan'. Well, sir, the long an' the short o' it was that the schooner got away through the Soun', an' I reached the shore safely, an' we had a right good laugh at the cutter."

"Was that why you are called 'Flyaway Jack'?" simpered Miss Todd.

But without waiting for an answer, she suddenly gave vent to the most awful shrieks, and refused to be comforted or explain. When we were sufficiently recovered to examine into the mystery for ourselves, we found that a gigantic crab had fastened on to her toe, to which it

clung with such characteristic persistency that its claw had to be broken off. Miss Todd wept a little, and then hobbled away; and, as the rain had stopped, the others followed her.

Our host was exceedingly indignant, regarding the interruption as a personal affront; and though truthful accuracy demands a few more details in his story, I was never afterwards able to obtain them. Perhaps, however, we should not be far wrong in supposing that it really was the origin of his curious name, Flyaway Jack.

LAURESTINUS.

How empty seems the firelit room,
Where half in glow, and half in gloom
Her life's mute tokens lie;
An open desk, a book laid down,
A mantle dropped, of gold and brown,
The bloodhound watching by.

An easel veiled, and thereupon
Her finished work, a victory won
By months of honest toil:
The fair fulfilment of her dreams
Among her native woods and streams,
Far from the world's turmoil.

Beside the bloodhound's mighty jaw
Her flower has dropped; with tender awe
I mark the hardy spray
Of laurestinus, glossy green,
White flowers and tiny buds between
All pink as unblown may.

I dare not touch the pretty prize,
O'er-watched by those half-open eyes;
But looking on the flower,
It seems most meet that she should wear
This blossom, blown in winter air
And washed by winter's shower.

No rose for her of ruddy hue,
With thorns to pierce, as love's thorns do,
Or steep the soul in sense;
No lily trembling on its stem,
However meet such diadem
For her white innocence.

But this bright, hardy evergreen,
That holds its blossoms white and clean
Above the dark, damp mould;
That shows alike to sun and shower
Its glossy leaf, its pearly flower,
Through all the winter cold.

It asks no shelter from the storm;
She seeks no love to keep her warm,
But love of closest kin;
The crown of work, its blessed cares,
The smile of Heaven, the poor man's prayers,
Are all she strives to win.

And so she fares, alone, apart,
Life-consecrate to God, to Art,
And giving both her best;
She wears, afar from worldly strife,
The blossom "of a blameless life"
Upon her quiet breast.

OUR FRENCH FRUIT-GARDEN.

OF the myriad Britons who are almost as familiar with the Seine as with their own Thames, not one in ten thousand perhaps has taken much heed of the river which

shares with it in giving a name to the metropolitan Department, or ever followed the windings of the Marne farther at least than Vincennes, a spot visited because it is reckoned among the "sights of Paris." Beyond that point it is rarely tracked by the tourist, even so far as the historic city of Meaux, within about thirty miles of the capital, though the territory which includes this part of its course is one to which we are indebted in no small degree. The valley in which it flows, and the fertile slopes which rise on either hand, may gladden the eyes of their inhabitants in spring with a flush of verdant and blossomy beauty, but to them will fall only a very moderate share of the rosy and golden crops of summer and autumn. It is our thirsty palates which will be cooled with their refreshing juices, for this is our French fruit-garden, and England is the grand consumer of what is grown within an area of many miles. A pleasant district it is, too, for any who wish to see something of French country life, and the writer can affirm from experience that a summer may be passed very agreeably among the towns and villages of this part of France.

Bearing a strong family resemblance to each other, as a good specimen of these may be named the twin villages of Couilly and St. Germain, each complete in itself, with church, mairie, and schools, though forming but one settlement only divided by a bridge. To the ordinary attractions of the neighbourhood, pure air and pretty scenery, is here added the charm of abundant water, delicious for drinking as drawn from many deep wells; offering occasional opportunities for boating on the canal which runs hence to Meaux, and a fine field for the angler in the little river Morin, a tributary of the Marne. Some of the idler inhabitants—ex-citizens of Paris, come to end their days here in rural retirement—haunt the banks of this little stream day after day for many long hours at a stretch, finding much excitement in the casual nibble of a pike of two or three pounds weight, the ordinary reward of their exertions being perhaps half-a-dozen gudgeon or bream, varied not unfrequently by a totally empty basket. But both river and canal are very prolific in weeds; these are prejudicial to the working of the many mills which are scattered about on the banks of the former, and they are therefore often drained off to a very low ebb in order to clear away these obstructions, leaving

oarsmen and anglers, their "occupation gone," to await wearily the time when the waters shall flow again. To the adjacent village of Villiers, where the current is a little less impeded, many Parisians make excursions on Sundays to enjoy the fishing there; but perhaps from paucity of accommodation, the so-called hotels being mere small inns, such flitting visitors rarely arrive at Couilly.

If aquatic pleasures sometimes fail, there are others which are less uncertain, and the lover of wild-flowers, whether botanist or mere posy-picker, will find here abundant treasures. Not only does white clematis weave its dense tangles in every hedge, but these "virgin bowers," as they are poetically termed in rural England, are sometimes tapestried with the large purple-flowered variety. Willow-herb glows beside the water, and yellow lilies gild its stream. Hoary mullein and parti-coloured bugloss rear their tall stems by the wayside, while pink mallow, dianthus, or centaury blush rosy below. Bluebells of various sizes wave in the breeze, only rivalled in colour by the turquoise stars of succory, or yet intenser azure of borage. Wild thyme and sweet marjoram clothe the sandy banks with their rich chocolate hues, and fiery troops of poppies light up every wheat-field. We miss, however, the elegant blue cornflower, which should bear the latter company; and the stately fox-glove, which so beautifies our English and Welsh landscapes, is here conspicuously absent. Something else, too, is lacking; the honeysuckle is seen twining among the bushes, but its odour bewrayeth it not; many a yellow spike looks like the apricot-scented agrimony of England, but there the likeness ends; and even that most powerful of perfumes, which renders our meadowsweet only bearable in very small quantities, is here represented by a faint tinge of scent when the flowers are held close to one's face. This may, perhaps, be due to a dryer climate than that of our island, but, whatever the cause, it is certainly a fact that wild flowers here scarcely appeal to any sense but that of sight.

The flourishing of these "weeds," as they are sometimes scornfully called, is but an additional outcome of the fertility of the soil, for they are not allowed to choke the good seed. Every kind of vegetable growth seems to prosper, and every proprietor appears to aim at having as great variety as possible. Hedges are but rarely

seen, they would occupy too much valuable space where the ground is so subdivided, for it is rather exceptional to find so much as a single acre covered with one kind of produce. Where cornfield ends, therefore, vineyard begins; no boundary intervenes between a patch of potatoes and one of maize, a few rows of beans, or some heads of mangold-wurzel; so that the country looks like one vast kitchen-garden. Various kinds of vegetation, indeed, are not merely not divided, but are even intermixed: currant-bushes grow between the vines, and pear or cherry trees spread their shadows amid the wheat. Walnut-trees are very abundant, springing up everywhere in the fields, though not in use to border the roadways; but it is only occasionally that a few sacks of the nuts are crushed for their oil. Ordinarily they are stored for the winter, and, eaten with bread, form an acceptable repast to the peasants.

The produce of the numerous vineyards, too, is made into ordinaire for home consumption, the grapes not being fine enough to make wine for exportation. Even for this limited use they hardly prove satisfactory. "When I was young, and I am now seventy-seven," said an old vintager, who entered into conversation with us one chilly day in June, "then indeed there were summers. I remember in 1845 we had one. You could not lie down on the open ground, for the very earth burned you, the sun had so scorched it; but what a season for the vines! Now we have not had a good one these fifteen years, not since the summer before the Prussians came. As to this year, why there are rows and rows of vines over yonder with not a single bunch upon them. And yet one is expected to pay the taxes all the same. Ah, those taxes, they do weigh upon one;" and the old man sighed and shrugged, as though the burden were pressing literally upon his aged but still vigorous shoulders. Nor have winters, of late, been more favourable than summers in this region. Even within the city of Meaux, the fine old yew-tree walk in the bishop's palace gardens—which was Bossuet's favourite outdoor study when composing his sermons as he paced up and down it, and which, until 1880, had looked just as it did in the days of the eloquent prelate—is now but a pitiful display of lifeless stems and brown withered leaves, the work of recent cruel frosts, while all about the country dead trees were so frequent as to be quite remarkable, the explanation of

their condition being always, "the cold winter two years ago."

Where laden trees and bushes are unprotected by wall, hedge, or ditch, an English stranger's first thought is, How unsafe—how exposed to plunderers! If adults are honest or indifferent, surely children will be always committing depredations! The sufficient reply is, Why should they plunder when every child has at home as much as it can desire? No wonder that when the more solid products of autumn succeed summer's lighter delicacies, illness often results from too free indulgence in these luxuries, and that choleraic attacks become prevalent.

But however freely the cultivators may treat themselves to this feast of Nature, far more is brought forth than could be consumed by themselves; and, with the exception of nuts and grapes, the greater part of the fruit is grown for exportation to England. On taking refuge from a storm one day in an outhouse, belonging to a little inn, the door of which stood open, we found it literally crammed with huge hampers of black-currants, being weighed previous to sending away, and on asking permission to buy a few for refreshment while waiting for the weather, were told to help ourselves without payment, petty retail dealings being below notice amid such abundance. A similar reply was made on another occasion, when we wished to gather from a cottager's garden some of the ruby clusters which hung so profusely on his red-currant bushes that crimson almost preponderated over green. Yet it is made easy for even small growers to contribute their share for shipment, for one day we heard the crier perambulating the villages to announce, with beat of drum, that to-morrow, at four p.m., M. Chose would be prepared at such a place to receive any quantity of currants, offering payment for them at the rate of thirty-three francs per hundred kilogrammes.

There is something besides fruit for which this district is famed, the well-known fromage de Brie, and on market-days the stalls for the sale of these flat, creamy cakes outnumber all others. But since cheese is a staple commodity, where are the cows? One may walk for miles and not see a single one, for instead of pasturing freely in open fields they are kept shut up in stables, and fed there with the leaves of maize, cut green for their use, or other fodder. Sheep, too, are scarcely ever visible, so that the landscape, however

otherwise charming, is strikingly deficient in animal life. There is no dulness, however, for towns or villages are not more than two or three miles apart; scattered houses occur in the intervals, and it is seldom that some vehicle is not within view upon the roads, or an azure gleam does not appear among corn or vines to betray some human presence. For in costume one hue reigns supreme. If the Holy Mother be little honoured in any other way, at least what devotees call "the Virgin's colour" is worn hereabouts by about nine-tenths of the population, though it is hardly upon her account. Blue blouses are assumed by even gentlemen en déshabillé, to which the working-classes add blue "continuations," and frequently a blue cap also; while among women below the grade of lady, in gowns, jackets, and aprons, at least for everyday wear, the same tint prevails almost universally. No doubt these thrifty French are well aware that indigo is the most durable dye that cotton can be made to take. With regard to head-dress, the younger females seldom cover their hair at all; shopkeepers and servants wear frilled mob-caps like those of the Parisians, white as only French washerwomen can whiten; and the older peasants content themselves with a coloured handkerchief wound turban-fashion round the head, the same head-dress therefore serving them indoors and out, a great saving of time and expense. In third-class railway-carriages, a bonnet is quite an exceptional sight.

The roads throughout the district are remarkably excellent, so even and hard, that in wet weather they are almost exempt from puddles, and in dry weather from dust. They are mostly lined with trees, affording grateful shade on hot days. These are sometimes limes or elms, but more often solemn rows of poplars, whitening the soil beneath them at midsummer with the tufts of cottony-down in which their seeds are embedded, till it looks as though a general goose-plucking had taken place in the vicinity, or a slight snow-shower had just fallen. A little later the ground is scattered still, though rather more sparingly, with equally white moths, about an inch long, developed from the caterpillars which feed on the poplar, and which, after having performed the grand duty of their life in laying eggs for another generation, lie exhausted at the foot of their native trees, blown about by the winds till they perish. These mimic snows are

especially observable on the banks of the canal, which is bordered by close rows of extra tall poplars of imposing solemnity. To walk beneath them, especially on a sultry summer day, when a glimpse of sunshine beyond deepens the gloom of their shadows, delightfully cool as it is to the bodily sensations, is yet almost as awe-inspiring to the mind as it is to pace the dusky aisles of some ancient cathedral. The sombre effect of the still solitude, guarded by these funereal sentinels, is heightened to a thrill of horror when we learn what ghastly fruit their boughs have borne—only a year ago a stranger was found hanging upon one of their branches, having evidently been robbed and murdered during the night, but to whom he had fallen a victim, who he was, or whence and why he had come there, has never been discovered.

The houses, usually kept in very good repair, are substantially built of brick, almost invariably coated, as are even the garden-walls, with cream-coloured cement, which mellows with time into many beautiful tints. The mairies, and perhaps one or two larger mansions, display slated tops, but throughout the neighbourhood tiles form the general roofing of house or hut, not a thatch being seen anywhere. And very harmonious is the aspect of these red roofssurmounting the yellowish white walls, especially when peeping out in the distance from a surrounding verdure of orchards or plantations, at different heights on the hilly ridges, which are usually terraced with two or three roadways rising one above another. In the village streets sometimes the gable, sometimes the side of the house, faces the highway, but the ordinary absence of front gardens takes off from the neat prettiness which characterises English cottages. The general impression given by the buildings is perhaps primarily one of well-to-do respectability, yet artistic charm is by no means lacking, for there is great variety of size and form, and every here and there an outside staircase, a wooden gallery, or quaint combination of projecting roofs, gives an air of picturesqueness. In one instance we came upon a most pictorial bit, hidden away behind modern houses—an old courtyard enclosing an ancient edifice, dating, it was said, from the days of Henri Quatre, with its round tower in the corner, surmounted by an extinguisher-shaped turret. Within doors, too, we may find perhaps a kitchen, which, with its huge open fireplace—where a brazen

cauldron hangs gipsy-fashion over the glowing logs, and a row of bright copper skillets glitters above—may offer a tempting subject to the painter; but the general aspect of the interiors, their bare walls, brick floors, and scanty furniture, give an idea of a ruder and more primitive style of living than is common among English country people of far smaller means than most of these possess.

St. Germain has only a mean modern place of worship; Couilly, a fine old Gothic church, which has stood for centuries, and is almost large enough for a cathedral. There is but one priest, however, who officiates in each at different hours, but only on Sundays, and except just when services are being held, they are kept close locked, for, though there was a time when the thief who stole from a mansion without scruple would yet have hesitated to enter the house of God with sacrilegious intent, this is hardly now the case, in proof whereof has not the church of Nogent-sur-Marne, not very far off, been twice robbed within the last twelve months? Nor was the priest ever met with in the villages except just at the hour for mass, and on our going to vespers one Sunday at Couilly the congregation assembled in the immense building was found to consist of three old women and five little girls.

Such being the state of Catholicity, how does it fare with the rival creed? At Quincy, about three miles from St. Germain, is a Protestant temple, a small barn-like building, methodistically bare within and without. Here the audience amounted sometimes to twenty, sometimes fell short of a dozen, though a majority of the sixteen hundred souls inhabiting Quincy are nominally Protestants, and this is the only Reformed place of worship within a large circuit. This indifference does not seem due to any want of zeal on the part of the pastor, if this may be judged of by his manner, for he warmly greets his flock individually, and after prayer, lesson, and hymns accompanied by an harmonium, pours forth his sermon in tones of such fervour as to make the walls reverberate, and with a vehemence of gesture that is almost alarming. The subject is "The Idea of Deity in Different Ages," and it is very well treated as he traces the progress of the primitive notion of the divinity as mere brute force to its final development as the loving Father revealed by Our Saviour, adverting then to modern beliefs and unbeliefs. Such a discourse, with all its allusions to Atheism,

Pantheism, and Agnosticism, seemed hardly suitable to the tiny group of shopkeepers, peasants, and children who had gathered to hear it, but perhaps it was a single concession to the spirit of the age, for on several other occasions the worthy pastor's sermons erred rather on the side of excessive simplicity, and were little more than the addresses usually delivered in Sunday-schools.

Where there is so little attendance on the services of religion it may be supposed that there is no very intimate acquaintance with its doctrines. The relative merits of the Catholic and Reformed faiths were estimated in an amusing way by an old farmeress who sat down beside us one evening in the fields, and questioned us with almost American freedom. On eliciting that we were Protestants, she exclaimed, "Ah, that is a fine religion, you can be married or buried for nothing, while we Catholics have to pay such enormous fees to our priests at our weddings or funerals;" and this seemed to be the only difference she knew of between the followers of Luther or of the Pope, though some instinct of loyalty to tradition kept her true to the profession, at least, of Romanism. It is indeed only to be married or to be buried that the vast majority of the population here ever enter their places of worship, and when some French friends well acquainted with various provinces of their country assured us that this was the least pious part of France, it was easy to believe the statement, for piety could scarcely be anywhere at a lower ebb.

"Certainly these people cannot be called devout, but are they moral?" was asked of an intelligent inhabitant. "They have no time to be otherwise," was the reply. "When people are at work early and late they cannot find leisure for dissipation." Leisure, indeed, seems a word of which they can hardly know the meaning. At five a.m. the ring of the church-bells calls them to labour, and at eight p.m. bids them leave the fields for their homes; but many, it is said, rise two hours earlier, and, evidently enough, all work did not cease with the curfew-peal. Even at midnight heavily-laden vehicles might be heard upon the roads, and from one farm a waggon was dispatched weekly to Paris which regularly travelled thither all night under the sole charge of a girl of sixteen and a dog. Another girl of twelve, eldest daughter of an invalid mother with many children, managed the whole household,

and cooked and washed for all the family, besides taking her part in field-work. Under this regimen she had developed, at the age of a mere child, into the appearance of a sturdy woman, and though this was a special instance, the young lasses commonly looked much older than their years. Nor does the week's toil end on Saturday night, for though on Sundays the accustomed summons to work does not sound from the steeple, the scythe or the sickle is still plied in the fields and the pruning-knife is busy among the vines. Every moment of time, every inch of territory, seem to be devoted to cultivation. Though the cottages which line the narrow village streets so rarely have any forecourt, not the less are the front walls as well as the others utilised for the training of vines or pear-trees, only guarded from passers-by brushing against them by a few sticks nailed across their stems. Where it does happen that there is a garden-wall, the outside towards the road, if the aspect be favourable, is sometimes made, equally with the interior, to bear its share in supporting some climbing fruit-tree.

The natural result of all this is an extraordinary prevalence of material prosperity. Many are rich; none are very poor; no pinched faces or ragged garments are to be seen. A boy who had torn the sleeves of his blouse was indeed so unique a spectacle, that he was at once seized upon by our artist-friend and strictly commanded not to let his mother mend them until his portrait in this picturesque condition should be completed. A sufficiency of food and decent raiment seems to be the portion of even the lowest, for, to all enquiries made about poor people, the only reply was, "There are none. Of course there are some who are not so well off as others, but there is no one in absolute indigence;" and observation only tended to confirm the statement. It is true the British workman's too common ideal of prosperity—fresh meat every day—is not attained; but as this, despite a general prejudice, is certainly not essential either to health or enjoyment, it is hardly to be deplored. The French peasant, however, has not that disdain for the art of cookery which is sometimes found among our working-classes, and knows how to make very appetising dishes from materials always at hand. A dish, for instance, which is very general in these parts, consists of potatoes, onions, and bacon cut

in small pieces, with various herbs or other vegetables for flavouring, the whole kept for some hours over a gentle fire till it forms a most savoury stew. Soup, made in the pot-au-feu, which appears more or less at every table, rich or poor—it is a received axiom that no children can thrive unless they consume plenty of soup—is usually the peasant's portion more than once in the day; and fruit, in this paradise of Pomona, of course forms quite an article of diet. But thrift has been early taught. It is a fashion for the maire and principal inhabitants to offer prizes in the communal schools, in addition to the books given by the school, and these always take the form of certificates of deposit in the savings-bank for sums varying from a napoleon to a franc. To this practical lesson in saving is added the example of parents and superiors too often carrying the habit to a pernicious extreme, for the virtuous frugality of the poorer class is balanced by the vicious penuriousness of those who have risen above them in fortune, but in little else, expenditure scarcely increasing with means. Really wealthy farmers, mill-owners, tannery proprietors, frequently dress and work like common labourers, grudge a doctor's attendance when ill, and will hardly indulge in change of air when their very lives depend upon it. It is true they will give their children a good education, but, as soon as school days are ended, they expect them to return to domestic drudgery. A miller's daughter who was married the other day, brought a dowry of sixty thousand francs to her bridegroom, who owned as much himself, while a grandfather made over to them as a wedding-present a mill valued at one hundred thousand francs. This girl had been sent for a time to an expensive boarding-school in Paris, but ever since her return had been acting as general servant in her parents' house, and would in all probability fulfil the same part in her own. In fact, the more intelligent residents agreed that Balzac might have laid here the scene of his Eugénie Grandet, and they would have felt the story to be no exaggeration.

Once a year at least this perpetual travail yields to a day, or rather a night of enjoyment. Each village holds its annual fête in the course of the summer or autumn, and Montguillon had fixed on the evening after the National Festival of July 14th.

Two or three toy and gingerbread stalls hold out baits to the children, but the

centre of attraction is a large booth, which travels about from one of these fêtes to another as their period arrives. Lined with striped cotton, and decorated only with small pendent tricolours, one end is parted off by a low barrier to form a sort of bar-room, where the old men sit at little tables over their wine, while the younger ones go in and out for an occasional glass. Another smaller enclosure at the side rails in a band of five musicians, and the rest of the space is devoted to the dancers, who pay threepence each on entry, no further tax being laid upon the ladies, whereas the gentlemen have to pay three sous for each dance in which they engage. A rather awkward business it appears both as regards payers and payee, as the collector, an elderly woman in black dress and white cap, glides in and out among the gyrating couples to gather this toll as soon as they begin to move, and the rustic has to keep hold of his partner as well as he can while he fumbles under his blouse for the necessary coppers. As one dance is no sooner over than another begins, and no able-bodied dancer cares to sit still while others are in motion, the expense becomes ultimately rather heavy, as the entertainment lasts from about eight p.m. till one or two o'clock in the morning.

The occasional handing round of a paper of sugar-plums seemed to be the only refreshment offered to partners, unless under that head might be included the hearty kiss upon each cheek, which was the customary parting salute ere the lady retired to her seat as waltz or quadrille ended. But there was no pushing or confusion due to not knowing steps or figures, and though now and then some rather lively displays of agility, and an occasional swinging round of partners with somewhat more force than was necessary, might be observed, yet really this rustic ball-room offered nothing that could shock the most decorous. The girls were mostly attired in plain dark-coloured merinos, their only ornament a tiny bow or brooch in the collar or lace tucker; for, though flowers grow here so freely, none had been gathered to wreath or deck their close-coiled and simply-braided tresses, and only one here and there wore even a rose or spray of honey-suckle at her bosom. So far, indeed, from any appearance of that elegance and coquettishness we are apt to attribute to French womankind, there was a positive deficiency of adornment, only a single one among the crowd of at least fifty or sixty young lasses

wearing any approach to a festive costume, and hers consisted only of a white muslin tunic which had seen some service, over a red and white striped petticoat. The men were nearly all in their ordinary blue blouses, with a staring paper tricolour pinned at the breast in patriotic recognition of the national anniversary.

Beyond these annual fêtes, the only provision for recreation apparent was the shooting-butt erected in every village—a narrow space enclosed between walls, and having at each end an arch of brickwork, filled in with straw. Here, on Sunday afternoons, a few, but only a few, of the men might be seen practising with bows and arrows, for muskets would be deemed too expensive.

A cheerful "Bon-jour" usually greets the passing stranger in this region; any little service requested is most courteously rendered; and a desire to enter into conversation is often shown. It is, therefore, not difficult to form cordial relations with the natives, and for an English visitor to do so seems almost a duty, as a sort of attempt at some slight reparation for the terrible descent once made here by our countrymen. In 1424, when the troops of the King of England and the Duke of Burgundy occupied jointly the town of Coulommiers, they vexed this neighbourhood with incessant depredations. All the country around the Marne was ravaged by their incursions, harvests were carried off or destroyed, and farms pillaged and burnt. The prettiest spot hereabouts, a little wood where a stream makes its way down a ravine between leafy heights to join the river below, to this day bears the name of Bois de Misère. It is said that this ominous title still attests the frightful extremities to which the people were reduced at that time, when, the wood being probably of far greater extent, the poor creatures sought in it some slight shelter during what a local annalist justly calls, "Cette abominable guerre."

The recollection of these ancient miseries, however, has been pretty well effaced by far more recent troubles.

In the very dining-room where we take our meals the Prussians a few years ago stabled their horses, and wrenched the doors off their hinges to burn as firewood. Allusions to such reminiscences often occur. One elderly lady, fatigued now with a walk of a couple of miles, remarks: "Yet I had to trudge on foot all the twenty-seven miles between this place and Paris, and

with the snow on the ground, too, when I slipped through the German lines to rejoin my husband here; for it was the only way in which the journey could be accomplished. It was long before I recovered from its effects." Yet justice is rendered even to the inflictors of so many hardships. "I went at first to friends in the South," said another lady, "thinking the siege would only last a few weeks. After waiting six months I had to return, and found my house occupied by Prussian soldiers and completely dilapidated. Whenever they came to houses which had been abandoned they felt irritated and damaged them recklessly; but I cannot deny that when I returned and took up my abode with them, they did not behave badly. And, Frenchwoman as I am to the core, I must own that our enemies had one good quality—they were wonderfully kind to children. The great stalwart fellows were often seen trotting out our little boys and girls for a walk, or even hushing our babies off to sleep in their arms. Very likely they were themselves fathers of families, and would far rather have been peaceably at home with them than here fighting with us. Heaven send we may never again go to war!"

Surely no one could look around on this smiling fertile country and mix with its friendly and industrious inhabitants without responding to this prayer with a hearty Amen!

JENIFER.

BY ANNIE THOMAS (MRS. PENDER-CUDLIP).

CHAPTER XXXIV. "ARE YOU HAPPY?"

SHE found him standing by the fireplace, looking with evident interest at the various costly and beautiful ornaments that decorated the wide velvet mantel-board. She checked herself when she came within a few feet of him, clasped her hands loosely together, and stood there silent and motionless, waiting for him to begin the battle.

If she had been given more time, she would have changed the Watteau tea-gown of old-gold "Liberty" silk for a less becoming and more matronly garment. She knew she looked well in this happy combination of lace and soft Indian silk, and she did not want to look well in his eyes. If he found her plain and dowdy, he would be less likely to persecute her with his presence.

He looked round, after what seemed to her a long period of time, and smiled pleasantly.

"You don't appear to be overjoyed at the sight of me," he began affably.

"Why have you come?"

"To see for myself that you have feathered your nest comfortably, and taken care of yourself all round."

"Only that?"

He laughed.

"For what other cause should I come? I have, to be sure, a great desire to see the gentleman whose declining years you are likely to render so peaceful and happy."

"You have come—to ruin me!" she broke out wildly. "You tempted me to the deceit in the first place; you almost forced it upon me; and now—now you have come to gloat over your work—to witness the ruin you have made, to revel in the agonies of your victim, and hers."

"So you admit that the old gentleman is a 'victim,'" he laughed out lightly. "But, upon my word, Mrs. 'Tullamore'—that, I believe, is your name?—you do me injustice. So far from wishing to 'gloat' and 'revel' over your misery, I have come in the hope of witnessing the most perfect conjugal bliss. You really must forgive me for saying so to a lady of your status in society, but if you had only had instruction—good instruction—in your early—I mean your earlier youth—you would have made a fine actress."

She tottered to a chair and sank down upon it.

"Now, that bit of sudden faintness was very well done," he said approvingly. "Am I to be favoured with an introduction to Admiral Tullamore before dinner or not?"

"I am distraught!" the unhappy woman cried, burying her face in her hands. "You know I am—you know I am so frightened that my tongue can hardly utter the words my maddened mind conceives."

"Be a sensible woman, and calm your mind," he said reassuringly. "What there is to upset you in this situation I am at a loss to imagine. Here am I, a friend of your former husband—the best friend he ever had, the closest, in fact, the friend who saw him buried—come to congratulate his widow on having doffed her weeds and buried her dead. All I ask is a little hospitality for a few days, and as much sport as can be crammed into them. Surely an Irish gentleman will accord me that for his wife's sake."

"You must have all things as you will," she said hopelessly; "but listen! You shall not torture that true, honest, noble heart which I may be compelled to break; you shall not taunt him with the fact of the woman he believes to be his wife being a liar, a traitress, an impostor, a fraud. I will tell him what I am myself."

"No, you'll not; there's really no occasion for it," he said coolly, shaking his head admonishingly at her, "if you'll only believe it. You're a most excellent and practical woman; you have done a good thing for yourself, Mrs. Tullamore, and, as a friend, I advise you to keep the good things you've got, and not to make sentimental strife. Thanks for your offer of a servant to take my luggage to my room. I look forward to meeting the admiral at dinner with real pleasure."

"You are laying a trap for me."

"I'm doing nothing of the kind, madam," he replied impatiently; "we are both free people, and I've no desire to clip your wings or fetter you in any way. I came, if you'll only believe it, to assure myself that you were happy."

She tore her hands away from her face, and looked at him in profound surprise.

"Are you happy?" he asked with some approach to feeling.

"Happy!"

"Don't repeat the word as if you had never known what it signifies, and never can again. Tell me, if, after this brief visit of mine, you can feel sure that you'll never see me again, will you be happy then?"

She heaved a deep long sigh.

"I can never be happy till I've cleared my conscience, and confessed the wrong I've done him to Admiral Tullamore."

"Then you're a very foolish woman," he said impatiently. "Moreover, what wrong are you going to confess to having done him? You are sure to make him a good wife, and I'm sure, as a friend of your former husband's, I shall thoroughly approve of your choice from what I have heard of him."

"Let me leave you now, and think," she asked humbly; and he opened the door for her, and courteously bowed her out of the room.

She was a coward. The majority of women would have been in such a case as hers. Still, she forced herself to dress as Admiral Tullamore liked to see her dress, and went down to meet her guest in the drawing-room, and to present him to her husband.

It seemed to her like a dream, from which she must awake with a crash that would stamp out her mind and brain, when she found herself seated at the table presently discoursing pleasantly of the prospected sport for the morrow. The gamekeepers were to receive Admiral Tullamore's strict commands that night concerning the best preserves, which were to be shot over by his wife's friend the next day. The best horse in the stable was to carry Mr. Whittler after the hounds the day after. Indeed, altogether Admiral Tullamore catered so liberally and heartily for the amusement of the self-invited guest, that her resolution to confess her fault and folly before she slept faltered again.

"Will you bring me a shooting-luncheon to-day?" Mr. Whittler asked his hostess as he was about to depart with the head-gamekeeper, a couple of beaters, and a brace of the finest pointers in the south of Ireland.

"If you wish it."

"The hollow under Kildale Wood will be the best place, me lady—about two o'clock," the gamekeeper suggested, and Admiral Tullamore cried out heartily:

"We'll be there to meet you with some scraps at that time, Mr. Whittler. Meanwhile, good sport to you; mind you bring home a good bag."

"There's no big game to fill it in this country," Whittler laughed. Then he went off with a respectful salutation to Mrs. Tullamore, leaving that lady with a mind burdened with an overwhelming sense of approaching calamity.

The best bottle of champagne from the cellar, the best pigeon-pie and cold game that the larder provided, together with the other etceteras of a shooting-luncheon, not forgetting some excellent curaçoa, were packed appetisingly and deposited in Mrs. Tullamore's four-wheeled dog-cart at about half-past one.

Then the lady, feeling singularly loth to start on the expedition, went to look for her husband, and he made her wheel round, as a proud mother does a child in a new and becoming dress, and inspected her costume.

It was his pride and pleasure to see her looking well, and she would so soon cease to be a source of either to him, that she strove to gratify his taste to the utmost this day.

Her dress of deep lapis-lazuli-blue serge, kilted to the waist with a well-fitting

short jacket of the same, trimmed with dark brown fur, fitted her like her skin, and suited both her complexion and figure admirably.

"I like women in winter dresses," he said approvingly; "muslins and fal-lals are all very well for young girls, but a woman always looks better in richer and more substantial gear."

"I don't like these tan-gloves with the deep blue dress, it's too much of a contrast. I ought to have gants de suède the same shade," she said, trying to take an interest in her attire to please him, for perhaps the last time.

Her hands shook as she gathered up the reins, and the two spirited ponies had it all their own way down the avenue. Luckily the gate was thrown open in time for them to pass through with safety, as she had lost temporary control of her little steeds. The thought, "Am I destined to break this dear old man's neck by my driving?" cut through her brain like a knife. The shock it gave her steadied her nerves, and with a long and a strong pull she got hold of her ponies' heads, and brought them back to a fast but steady trot.

"That was very like running away, my dear," he remarked.

"Wasn't it? They're so good generally, that I suppose I forgot they have the power to be naughty."

"Your hands shook as you gathered up the reins, and their mouths are very fine, you must remember. My dear one, you must be very careful; remember you are an old man's love, and if anything happened to you the old man's life would be over."

She could not look at him, she could not answer him. The blinding tears were in her eyes, the choking knot of strong emotion was in her throat. She was thankful that they were so near the trysting-place.

Kildale Hollow; under the great wood, was later than all the region round in changing its autumn robes of golden ferns, orange and crimson blackberry-leaves, and wreaths of honeysuckle, still in flower, for its wintry mantle of wither and decay. The bright sunshine was over it as they drove into it this day, and she could not help crying out in admiration of the glow of colour that was reflected upon the foliage from the sun's rays.

But her cry of admiration changed into a cry of horror as she caught sight of a group, men and dogs, huddled round some-

thing that lay prostrate on the ground. The "biggest" game that can fall to man's gun had fallen that day. The actor lay dead upon the ground, shot through the heart by his own hand.

And she sat there a living statue of intense suffering, while Admiral Tullamore gave brief, prompt directions as to what should be done. It was all too awful for the possibility of carrying on any further deception to linger in her mind. But while the servants were present she would spare him—the old man who had honoured her so highly.

When they moved slowly away, a ghastly burden between them on a hurdle, she got out of her carriage, and fell on her knees at his feet, and pleaded:

"Be merciful to me a sinner!"

"You a——"

She pointed towards the sad little group which was moving slowly out of sight.

"He was my husband," she said.

CHAPTER XXXV. DOWNHILL.

IN very truth the situation was a tragic one.

Not for a moment did Admiral Tullamore think that his wife was speaking the truth. He believed that the shock of the awful spectacle she had witnessed had turned her brain, and that her confession was mere mad raving.

So in his perplexity, bewilderment, pity, and grief, he first took off his hat, scratched his head to collect his ideas, and then took her hands soothingly and affectionately, still thinking that he was dealing with one whose mind was unstrung.

"Yes, yes, my dear," he said coaxingly, "I know all about it—all about it, my dear. We'll go home now, won't we? And you must let me drive your ponies for you for once, while you rest."

"You know all about it?" she cried, aghast at the tolerant way in which he was receiving her confession.

"Yes, yes, and it's all right, and we'll go away for a little change of air and scene," he said, still patting her hands soothingly, and praying that another burst of madness might not come on before he had got her safely back at Kildene, under the charge of her own maid.

The admiral, in fact, felt quite impatient of being made to linger a moment longer than was necessary in the scene of the late ghastly catastrophe. Mr. Whittler's awful death was a very sad and distressing thing, of course. But, as a matter of fact, the

admiral could not bring himself to feel any violent emotion about it. He had witnessed death a hundred times—death by sword and bayonet, and by drowning, death when he aimed his dart at friends and comrades in the battle, and on the ocean. This man had been neither friend nor comrade, indeed he was merely an acquaintance of a few hours' standing. It was shocking that the fatal accident should have occurred at all; but it was doubly shocking that it should have occurred at Kildene, to the detriment of Mrs. Tullamore's mind.

They drove home in silence, under the influence of mutual misunderstanding. She crying bitterly in shame, and fear, and contrition, wondering how he could endure to sit quietly by her side, and take her hand with such protecting tenderness, since he "knew all." He thinking with love and pity that her dear, womanly, tender heart was wrung to madness, since she wept so bitterly for a stranger, merely because he had been her bad husband's friend.

Some of his American admirers, who had come over to Europe in order to witness Mr. Whittler's success on the English stage, came over to Kildene, and had the corpse conveyed to London and buried in the Brompton Cemetery, and all the dramatic talent in London at the time attended the funeral to do honour to his memory.

And all this time his widow failed to bring herself up to the courage-point of making Admiral Tullamore comprehend the real truth.

But when she read the account of Mr. Whittler's funeral, when she realised that from him she had nothing more to dread, and felt that it rested with herself solely now whether she should remain the honoured mistress of Kildene, or cast herself out, poor, friendless, and shattered, on the wide world of want and woe, a better spirit, a humbler, braver spirit, possessed her; and it made her go to Admiral Tullamore with calmness and coherency and tell him all her pitiful story, and impress him with the truth.

When she had told him all—everything, nothing extenuating, nothing excusing—she stood with downcast head waiting for the verdict.

There was silence, then at last a sob. She looked up. The old man was wiping his eyes and blowing his nose vehemently. When he could speak all he said was:

"My poor, hardly-treated, hardly-tempted dear, you must go off to Dublin to-day, and to-morrow we'll be married over again, and we'll never speak of all that has happened before to-day as long as we live."

But if Mr. Whittler's death brought relief from slavery which had been worse than death, and eventually peace and prosperity to Mrs. Tullamore, it brought disappointment, and what he regarded as ruin, upon Captain Edgecumb.

He had, under the influence of the glorious success on the stage for Jenifer which Mr. Whittler had foretold so glowingly, risen from the ashes of his despair at her failure as a lyric artist, and become brightly hopeful again. And now, all in a moment, his hopes lay shattered and dead at his feet. And he told himself that he was tied for life to a woman who didn't love him, and, what was worse, who would never make any money for him.

His temper, under the combined circumstances of disappointment and what he regarded as penury, became rapidly one of those corroding things that cannot fail to wear the freshness and brightness out of the best and brightest women's hearts. Jenifer struggled on week after week and month after month, trying to keep the home-atmosphere clear, and at the same time to give singing-lessons, that she might preserve something like independence. But the period was an awful one, and she met with scant sympathy in her endurance of it from anyone but her mother.

It was a daily penance to Jenifer to see the way in which her husband permitted her mother to feel that her presence in their house was a nuisance to him. Yet, when goaded into resentment by his scant courtesy and ill-concealed dissatisfaction at her being there, Mrs. Ray would propose removing to another home, he would protest against the proposal as being unjust and injurious to himself.

"If she goes, she will take the pittance she gives you for her maintenance away with her, and I shall be left more in the lurch than ever," he would say to Jenifer, who always abstained from reminding him that all he contributed towards the household was wax-candles and good cigars. The remnant that was left to him of what money he had ever had, just sufficed to provide him with these trifles. And "Poor fellow! poor, bitterly-disappointed fellow! while I can work for the common necessities of life, he shall have these poor

pleasures of his still," Jenifer would say to herself and her mother, and old Mrs. Ray would applaud her determination, and secretly weep over her own inability to give more than her "all" to help her devoted daughter.

But there came a time when Jenifer could not work. When the toil of going long distances in draughty omnibuses to give singing-lessons at five shillings an hour to daughters of mothers who never thought that the teacher of singing could ever be cold, weary, or hungry, and so never offered her either luncheon or a fire, became first painful and dangerous, and then impossible to Jenifer. For a little son was born to her, and for his sake the toil and the battle of her unremunerative career had to be given up for a time.

From the day of her child's birth, Jenifer, though a poorer woman, was a much happier one. Once again Captain Edgecumb, "for the sake of the little chap at home," who needed so many things, began to feel that it behoved him to do a man's work in the world. As soon as he developed this energy, an opportunity of exercising it was granted to him, and though the stipend of this new clerkship was miserably small, compared with that of the secretaryship which he had so injudiciously resigned, still Jenifer undertook to make it do "for Boy's sake, with mother's help."

It cannot be said that the Edgecumb family put Jenifer's own brothers to shame by the amount of attention shown to, and interest displayed in, the little struggling family at this epoch. Mrs. Archie Campbell made a few spasmodic attempts to keep up intercourse with "Harry's wife," but social forces were against her. There were so many people belonging to Archie's set, whom they were compelled to ask to dine at stated intervals, that the brother and sister-in-law, who were "out of it," gradually got forgotten.

On the occasion of the elder Mrs. Edgecumb paying a ceremonial visit to her son Harry's first-born—which she did not do until that first-born had blinked at the world with enquiring grey-hazel eyes for three months—her nerves had a severe trial. She made that trial the matter of maternal counsel to her son when next she saw him.

"What a pity it is Jenifer doesn't keep a proper parlour-maid," she began pathetically. "I was more pained than I can

express by the manners of that young person who opened the door to me at your house yesterday. For a moment I thought I must be doing 'parish work,' instead of calling on the wife of my own son—a respectable parlour-maid is so very essential."

"Jenifer seems to think we can't afford one, mother, and indeed she's right; there are even now more mouths to feed than I can fill."

"Ah, such a pity that you threw yourself away as you did," his mother rejoined plaintively; "not that I find fault for one moment with Jenifer, only she hasn't the faintest notion of management, or of making the best appearance possible. Why not a parlour-maid instead of that very consequential nurse?"

"Oh, the boy must have a good nurse," the father answered promptly. He could bear to hear his wife found fault with, but he could not bear to hear that his little son should "do without" aught that might conduce to his weal.

"Nonsense, Harry! A girl, a decent girl of twelve or fourteen, can nurse the baby, or, as Jenifer is leading an idle life now, why can't she look after it herself? You ought to insist upon her taking a little more labour on herself personally, and having an excellent parlour-maid."

"I can't insist upon her doing anything, I suppose, till I can give her the money to do it with," he grumbled. And then his mother sighed and shook her head, and said she always had "disapproved of men marrying girls who wanted to go out in the world and make themselves conspicuous."

As was only natural, Jenifer had wanted to have her own brother Hubert to be one of the sponsors for her own first-born son. But circumstances had been against her. Mrs. Hubert Ray was celebrating her own return to Moor Royal by a series of well-managed and well-played theatrical entertainments, and she could not spare Hugh.

"Besides, it will only be a pokey sort of affair, the christening," she said to her sister Flora; "if Jenifer had the courage to secure a bishop to baptise her child, I'd even go myself. But to go up to town just now, when I'm establishing myself so well in the county, for nothing, would be folly."

"Anyway, let Hugh go," Flora said.

"Why should he? Just to be harassed by the sight of their impecuniosity. No! I won't persuade him to go. He's such an

affectionate fellow that he can't bear to think of his mother living in less style than she used to live in. Yet, as I tell him, he can't help her. He has me to think of, and it's a man's duty to think of his wife first, isn't it, Flora?"

"I wonder whether Captain Edgecumb thinks of his wife first," Flora said thoughtfully.

"I don't suppose he does; but then, that's just it. Jenifer doesn't want people to give up everything for her, and think of her before everybody else. So silly of her, I always think, especially in dealing with a selfish fellow like Captain Edgecumb; in fact, it's wrong. I should have made him think much less of himself, if I had married him. Look at Hugh."

"I often look at Hugh, Effie, and at you too, and do you know I've come to the conclusion that he's not as weak—yieldingly weak, I mean—nor you so selfish as you appear. You two 'get on,' thank Heaven!"

"Thank Heaven!" Effie echoed so heartily that Mrs. Jervoise feared her sister might go on to say:

"I renounce hunting, and pretty dresses, my own way, and every other snare that has been laid for me."

However, Effie did nothing of the sort. She only said:

"If Hugh likes to go to the christening of Jenifer's boy I won't say a word against it."

It was unfortunate that, when Hubert, after refusing, wrote to his sister to say he could come, she had provided other and more ready sponsors. Mr. Boldero was one, and two of Captain Edgecumb's relations the others, and the little boy was launched into the world with the names of "John Boldero Ray" before his surname of "Edgecumb."

Down at Moor Royal the ball was rolling far too fast. Effie, in her praiseworthy desire to efface all memories of other and inferior Mrs. Rays who had gone before her, strained all her resources too hard, and eventually cracked them.

It was not that she was ostentatious, or absurdly extravagant, it was only that she loved to look at harmonies and the other best things this world affords. It was altogether inconsequent and opposed to her sense of the fitness of things that the

mistress of Moor Royal should not deal out hospitality and pleasure to the neighbourhood with a lavish hand. That was all. And her conception of the situation was correct. Only it was an expensive one.

So difficulties—money difficulties—that would not let themselves be set aside and forgotten, were perpetually recurring at Moor Royal, and were as perpetually being cleared away by Mrs. Jervoise, whose sympathy and regard for her sister were of an unflinching sort that would have gone far to redeem a much more faulty character than Flora's.

And in Jack's household, at the Home Farm, a coarser style of extravagance prevailed. Minnie had been a thrifty housekeeper when she first became Mrs. Jack Ray, but the temptations of her new position had soon grown too strong for her. She was not an idle woman by nature, but to work with her hands seemed to her to be an "unladylike" thing to do. And her head gave her no occupation.

So being destitute of all mental resources, and disdaining to occupy herself in any household labours, Mrs. Jack Ray, by way of passing the time, spent all the money she could lay her hands upon in the purchase of finery for her own wear at the Exeter shops; and when she could not lay her hands on any money, she had the finery still by going in debt for it.

When the three years expired, at the end of which the sealed letter containing the late Mr. Ray's last will was to be read, both his sons were in sad straits for want of money, and both of them had alienated themselves entirely from their mother and sister.

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